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## Introduction

***Community Roots for Oral Health — Guidelines for Successful Coalitions*** is a compellation of information from many sources. Building a successful coalition is a process. These guidelines are designed as a road map to guide your efforts to improve oral health for the people in your community. It is organized in steps, although the process is rarely linear. Every community is unique, yet common threads connect stages of development.

The guidelines progress through six steps. Each step is associated with a critical task. These give an idea of what may be accomplished through the activities suggested in that stage of coalition development. There are questions included to stimulate discussion and decision- making. Worksheets are provided at the end of each step along with masters for making copies or transparencies.

Examples from Washington State are provided throughout to give you a sense of reality. There are numerous and valuable resources noted for your use. We borrowed from the best. When possible, we have provided information in the appendix.

Three basic principles shape the way in which the coalition building process is designed and implemented:

- § Locally Owned: The needs, strengths, and voices of local stakeholders drive change.
- § Culturally Competent: The Coalition respects, understands, and incorporates at all levels the implications of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. This respect and understanding guides efforts from policy setting to service delivery.
- § Systems Development Focused: Oral health improvement involves prevention, education, as well as access to dental care. All systems must be engaged in the change process — public and private, formal and informal, economic, educational, social, psychological, physical, and environmental.

We offer these guidelines because we believe that coalitions work. We hope that our experience in the area of building systems for oral health care helps you in your quest to serve your community.

Please let us know what works and share your experiences and ideas with us as well as with other community members. We are all in it together.



## Acknowledgements

***Community Roots for Oral Health — Guidelines for Successful Coalitions*** evolved from five years of experience in Washington State. The Washington State Oral Health Coalition (WSOHC) with the support of private and public partners has struggled with the issues surrounding disparities in oral health care. The Coalition has provided a forum for education on the prevention of dental disease. Subcommittee work on the use of fluorides and sealants has resulted in the expansion of public health sealant programs and promotion of fluoridation. Issue papers have been published dealing with universal health care, dental care delivery systems, access to dental care in rural and underserved areas, and fluoridation. Advocacy helped a successful initiative to raise Medicaid reimbursement rates for dental care for children. Private partners continue to support community-based fluoridation campaigns and prevention programs.

The success of the WSOHC gave root to a successful application for funding from the DHHS, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Community Integrated Services Systems Program. Technical assistance, training and networking have resulted in the formation of some thirteen community-based oral health coalitions in Washington. Annual conferences bring everyone together to share experiences and to acquire new skills and tools for building sustainable change at the community level.

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